

Legislative News



May 6, 2010

Rebooting Government Resolutions Heard in House Committee



The [House Higher Education Committee](#) conducted public hearings on two resolutions that would dramatically reorganize the education system in Missouri: [SJR 44](#), which creates a new department of education, and [SJR 45](#), which describes what the governing board of the new department of education would look like and what the powers of the board would be. The Senate passed these two resolutions last week. SJR 44 was approved unanimously after little debate, and SJR 45 was passed after considerable

debate and some amendments. Both resolutions were second read in the House this week before being assigned to the House Higher Education Committee.

The House Higher Education Committee heard testimony about the resolutions on Tuesday and Thursday of this week. Resolution sponsor [Senator Charlie Shields](#) introduced the measures. Shields said that although the resolutions could result in some immediate savings, the bigger savings

would come in the future and would result from increased efficiency. He also told the committee that he believes the creation of a single department of education could improve educational attainment in the state.

[MDHE](#) Deputy Commissioner Paul Wagner testified in favor of the proposal, as did Mike Nietzel, [Governor Jay Nixon's](#) higher education advisor. Committee members asked the proponents questions including what the cost savings would be, if other states have combined boards, and whether the board would address preschool.

Individuals speaking against the resolutions testified on Thursday. They included representatives of the Missouri Council of School Administration, the [Children's Education Council](#), and the [Missouri Education Reform Council](#). The [Missouri National Education Association](#) testified for informational purposes. [Truman State University](#) professor Candy Young testified based on her background as a political scientist.

The House Higher Education Committee will meet again next Tuesday, May 11 at 8:00 a.m. in HR6. The committee will discuss potential amendments to the resolutions and may take a vote on them.

SB 733 Moves to Conference Committee

[Senator David Pearce's SB 733](#), which originally extended the period that certain students who enter the military may defer [Bright Flight](#) awards, has grown substantially since it was introduced. The [Senate Education Committee](#) added language that clarifies several issues related to Bright Flight, such as the fact that home-school students and GED recipients may receive awards and when the "cut scores" for the ACT and SAT are established. Many of these changes simply codify existing [MDHE](#) practice.

SB 733 has been passed by the Senate. It was also heard and approved by the [House Higher Education Com-](#)

[mittee](#), which added additional language. SB 733 now includes language originally contained in [HB 1473](#) ([Access](#) GPA requirement for lower-division students), and [HB 1812](#) and [SB 784](#) (Access award amount equalization).

This week, SB 733 was third read and passed by the House. The Senate refused to accept the House's changes. Differences will now be resolved by a conference committee. The Senate representatives on the conference committee will be Senators [Pearce](#), [Rupp](#), [Schaefer](#), [Days](#) and [Shoemyer](#).



House Committee Hears Pension Bill



A large crowd was present for the public hearing on [Senator Jason Crowell's SB 714](#) which would change retirement contribution requirements for new state employees hired after January 1, 2011. The change in the pension plan, which has been approved by the Senate, applies to those enrolled in the [Missouri State Employees Retirement System](#) and the workers covered by the retirement programs of the [Missouri Department of Transportation](#) and the [Missouri State Highway Patrol](#).

Over 150 retired teachers showed up to voice their fears that the proposed changes would eventually apply to their retirement funds. Beyond those

fears, they voiced objection to the makeup of the proposed investment board. The retired teachers felt that the new board wouldn't be as accountable as a board that included members elected by retirees. Both the [Public School Retirement System of Missouri](#) and MOSERS include elected retiree-members who have a stake in the financial health of the system. Crowell explained to the committee that the bill would not affect retired teachers, and that the teachers had received incorrect information.

The bill has until session ends next Friday to be passed.

Update on Scholarship Transfer Bill

[Representative Jake Zimmerman's HB 1858](#), which would officially bring the [Minority and Underrepresented Environmental Literacy Program](#) from [DNR](#) to the [MDHE](#), was third read and passed by the Senate with language

that would also move the [Minority Teaching Scholarship Program](#) currently administered by [DESE](#) to the MDHE. The bill will now go back to the House where they can vote to accept the changes made by the

Senate or ask for a conference.

LEGISLATIVE NEWS

Pearce Named Chair of Joint Committee on Education

[Senator David Pearce](#) has accepted a one-year appointment to chair the General Assembly's [Joint Committee on Education](#). The 14-member joint committee is split evenly between Senate and House members of both parties. Members of the committee review and monitor the progress of education in the state's public schools and institutions of higher education and make recommendations to the General Assembly for legislative action.

UCM Names New President

The [University of Central Missouri](#) has announced that [Charles Ambrose](#), the current president of [Pfeiffer University](#), will become the 15th president of the university. Ambrose will be replacing [Aaron Podolefsky](#), whose contract expires at the end of June.

Access Missouri Bill Passes Committee

This week, the [Senate Education Committee](#) voted do pass on [Representative Mike Thomson's HB 1473](#), a bill that would make several changes to the [Access Missouri program](#). Changes include lowering the GPA required for certain lower-division students to receive renewal awards from a 2.5 to a 2.0; equalizing award amounts for students at public universities, Linn State, and private colleges and universities starting in 2014; increasing the maximum award for community college students starting in 2014; and removing "sunset" language that would end the Access Missouri program in 2013 unless it was reauthorized by the General Assem-

Higher Education Bills Move Forward

Two higher education-related bills have made significant progress in the legislature this week. [Senator Delbert Scott's SB 772](#) – which removes the minimum time for holding investments in the Missouri higher education savings program – has been truly agreed and passed. [Senator Bill Stouffer's SB 987](#) – which modifies provisions relating to higher education research projects – has been referred to conference committee in an attempt to reach a compromise between the House and Senate versions of the bill.

A+ Bill Truly Agreed and Finally Passed

[Representative Dan Brown's HB 2147](#) has been truly agreed and passed by the Senate with a 32 yes and 0 no vote. This bill exempts certain students who are dependents of recently retired military personnel from the three-year attendance requirement under the A+ Program. The bill will now go to the Governor's desk.

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Before the vote, committee members again focused their questions on the GPA requirement. Last week, bill sponsor [Representative Mike Thomson](#) indicated that the intention in the GPA change is simply to give students an opportunity to adjust to the increased rigor of college coursework. He also pointed out that Access Missouri is a need-based award and, as such, should be focused primarily on helping financially needy students.

The bill has not yet been placed on the Senate calendar.

